

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20515

September 19, 2003

H.E. Álvaro Uribe Vélez  
President  
Republic of Colombia  
Casa de Nariño  
Bogata, Colombia

Dear Mr. President:

In recognition of the tremendous challenges which your country faces in its war against terrorism and narcotics trafficking, we write to commend you for your government's stated commitment to helping to ensure greater security for all Colombians, but also to express our deep concerns about continuing links between segments of the Colombian security forces and paramilitary terrorist organizations.

Several actions by your government have served to promote human rights in Colombia. Most notably, we welcomed your government's invitation to the United Nations' Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to extend its mandate in Colombia through 2006, and your stated commitment to implement fully the recommendations of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in his February 2003 report. Of particular interest to us are the recommendations which address the need for: a sustained government security presence in rehabilitated or consolidated zones where many vulnerable populations, like Afro-Colombians and indigenous peoples, reside; the security forces to learn and adhere systematically to international human rights and humanitarian norms; the establishment of a task force within the Attorney General's Office which would specialize on investigating possible links between members of the security forces and paramilitary groups; and the immediate suspension from duty of any member of the security forces who has been involved in serious human rights violations.

We highlight these recommendations because we are deeply troubled by continuing credible reports of persistent links between members of the Colombian security forces and paramilitary terrorist organizations. In the latest Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Colombia, the U.S. Department of State found credible allegations of passive support and direct collaboration by members of the public security forces, particularly the army, and paramilitary groups. The State Department also found evidence suggesting that there were "tacit arrangements between local military commanders and paramilitary groups in some regions," where "members of the security forces actively collaborated with members of paramilitary groups - passing them through roadblocks, sharing intelligence, providing them with ammunition, and allegedly even joining their ranks while off duty."

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The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights made similar findings. In his February 2003 report on the human rights situation in Colombia, the High Commissioner revealed that the UN Office in Colombia had received reports of "security forces themselves announcing the impending arrival of paramilitary groups, and even of cases where local inhabitants recognized members of military forces among paramilitary contingents." The High Commissioner also noted that the impression of direct links between members of the security forces and the paramilitary was fueled by reports of the direct involvement of security forces in paramilitary activities, including massacres, theft, and organizational meetings.

Mr. President, these reports are troubling not only because of the humanitarian toll inflicted by this collaboration on vulnerable populations who are caught in the cross-hairs of the conflict, but also because we simply cannot condone any cooperation with known terrorists, such as the paramilitaries, whether that cooperation comes from private individuals, firms, or governments.

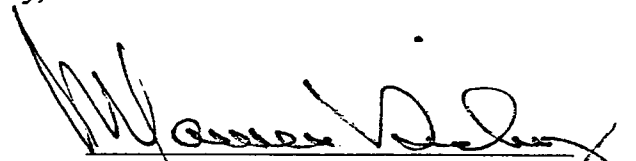
As we continue to work with you and your government on a broad range of initiatives of mutual concern, certain actions by your government would greatly ameliorate our concerns, including the immediate suspension of officers against whom there is credible evidence of paramilitary collaboration. We also would welcome increased funding and high-level support for the Public Advocate's office (Defensoria del Pueblo) and the Inspector General's office (Procuraduría). Finally, a clear sign of your government's commitment to shattering the links between members of the security forces and the terrorist paramilitaries would be the aggressive prosecution of high-ranking officers, such as former Navy Admiral Rodrigo Quiñones, who have reportedly been involved in serious human rights abuses with the paramilitaries.

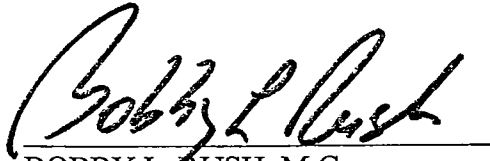
Lastly, although we applaud your courage and commitment to securing a lasting peace with the umbrella organization for the paramilitaries, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (known by the Spanish acronym, the "AUC"), we have doubts about your government's willingness to prosecute AUC members, including Carlos Castaño and Salvatore Mancuso, for their gross violations of human rights and drug trafficking in Colombia. Recent public statements made by Colombia's High Commissioner for Peace Luis Carlos Restrepo indicate that your government may consider allowing these criminals to receive suspended sentences and pay reparations in lieu of jail time. We believe that such an exchange would amount to impunity for serious human rights violations and would erode the rule of law in Colombia, encourage further violence, and establish an undesirable template for future negotiations with the guerrillas. Instead, we encourage you to ensure that an eventual peace agreement with the AUC includes accountability for human rights violations, excludes the possibility of cash-for-justice swaps, provides for the rapid disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of the AUC combatants, and requires that your government control disarmament and demobilization zones.

Mr. President, we recognize our nation's responsibility to help Colombia and look forward to working with you and your government towards our shared objective of a peaceful, secure, and prosperous Colombia.

Most Cordially,

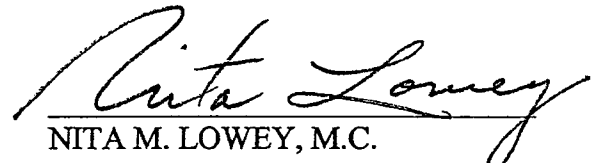
  
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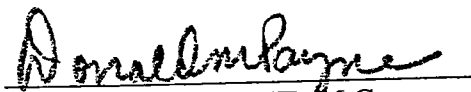
  
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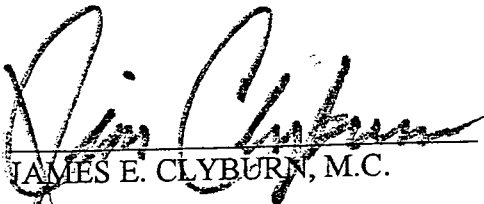
  
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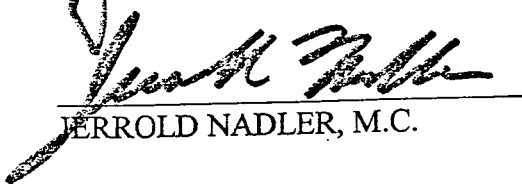
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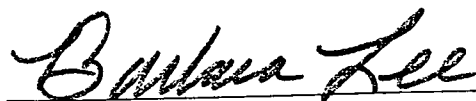
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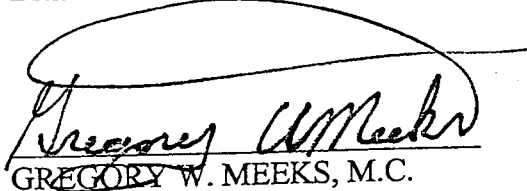
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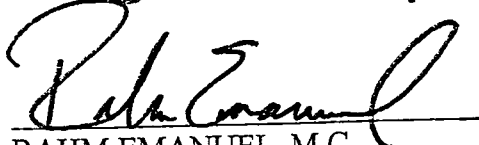
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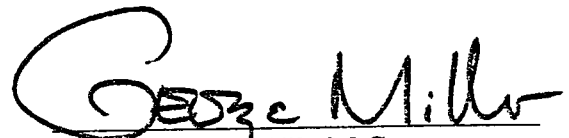
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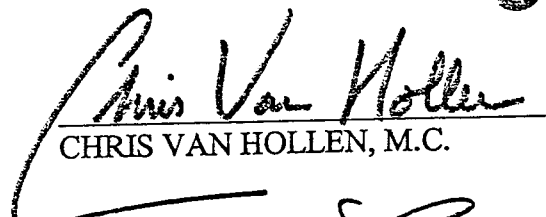
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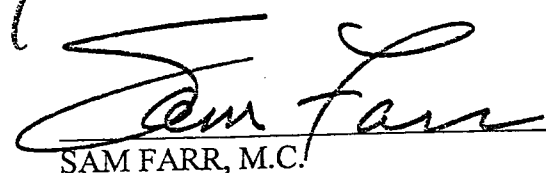
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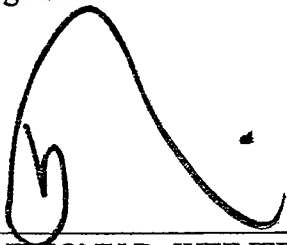
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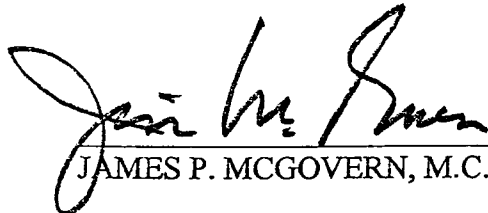
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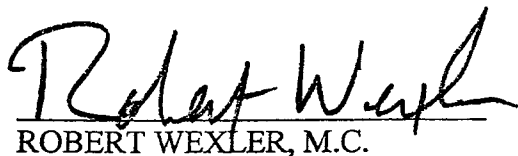
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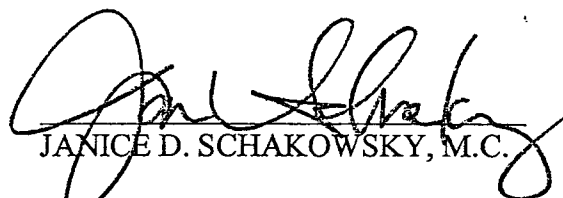
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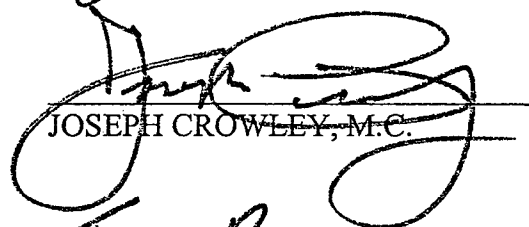
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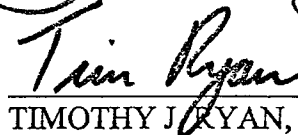
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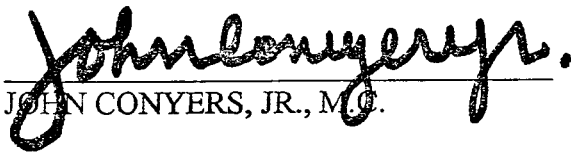
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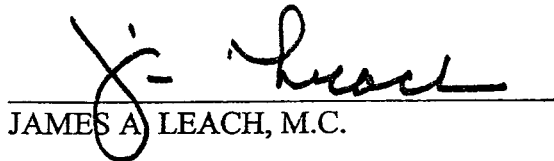


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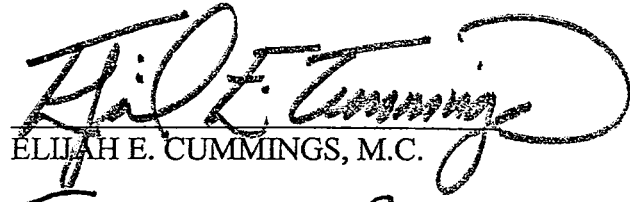
  
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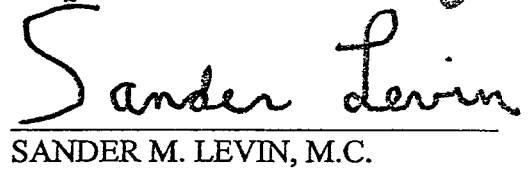
  
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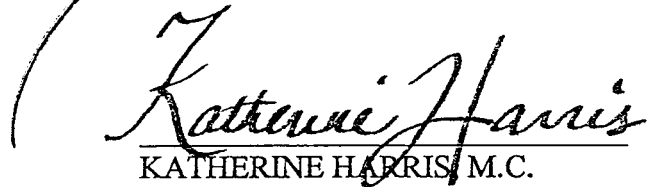
  
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